RING BINDER ASSEMBLY DEVICE TO INSURE THE PERFECTED CLOSURE OF BINDER RINGS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The instant invention relates generally to ring mechanisms of loose leaf binders and particularly to a ring binder assembly device for repairing and preventing misalignment of the rings in a loose leaf binder.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Ring binders are well-known tools for storing, displaying and organizing paper and other similar materials and are useful in a variety of settings; for example, in schools and offices. Ring binders are produced in many different shapes, styles and sizes for both aesthetic and functional purposes. The size is usually dependent upon the diameter of the ring closures, non-limiting examples include, ring closures of a half-inch, one inch, one and a half inches, 2 inches, 3 inches, 4 inches and 5 inches in diameter. Additionally, the rings can be crafted into various shapes for different purposes, non-limiting examples include, D-ring and continuous curvature.

While binders can be crafted in a variety of shapes, styles and sizes; they all generally share the same common binder ring mechanism. This mechanism is usually spring-loaded

and when engaged will quickly and efficiently clamp together to join opposing sides of the rings of the binder. However, due to the pressure exerted on the spring mechanism from repeated use, part and/or all of the ring and/or rings move out of alignment and cease to clamp tightly together. The ease of sifting through the contents of the ring binder is impaired and items may be lost from the binder due to slipping out from misaligned rings. This misalignment of the rings essentially destroys the function of the binder.

Without a quick and/or easy method of repair, the owner of the binder often purchases a replacement, costing both time and money. Thus, there remains a need in the art to mend this fundamental weakness in the design of ring binders by repairing and preventing misalignment of the rings, extending the "life" of the binder and saving the owner both time and money.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

US 4,690,580 discloses a ring binder mechanism of the type referred to wherein the ring portions are reliably adjusted on all sides in their closed position even with heavy loading and are secured against opening of the ring closure by displacement of the ends of the ring portions.

US 5,765,956 discloses a device for perfected closure of the mechanism having flat rings for containers of mobile

sheets(binders). The device comprises rings and screws which are formed with a single presswork operation together with a strip to be placed at the disposal of the user. The latter with simple coin screws within suitable orifices formed on the strip, the latter being fixed to the internal surface of the folder. There is also provided that each ring may be closed simply by causing projections which are formed on the base of each ring to penetrate within shaped grooves, the latter being formed at the opposite end of the same ring, an operation which is easy due to the elasticity of the material which constitutes the rings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The instant invention provides a ring binder assembly device that can both prevent misalignment of binder rings and repair binder rings which have become misaligned. The device of the preferred invention is both a resilient and flexible structure which substantially surrounds the existing binder rings. The device is comprised of at least two hollow tubes of continuous curvature which engage upon closing of the rings to form a single unit. The hollow tubes are sized to substantially cover the entire underlying binder ring and each can be formed as unitary or segmented elements. Since it has been theorized that a funnel-shape can guide a smaller object to a specific point, one end of one of the hollow tubes is

molded into a funnel-shape. Through use of this funnel-shape, the device of the instant invention renders it possible to guide one part of a ring to the other part of the ring, thus preventing misalignment and forcing the rings to realign properly should they be out of place.

Accordingly, it is an objective of the instant invention to provide a device which prevents misalignment of binder rings.

It is a further objective of the instant invention to provide a device which repairs binder rings which have become misaligned.

It is a still further objective of the instant invention to provide a device which can repair and/or prevent misalignment of binder rings.

It is yet another objective of the instant invention to provide kits for preventing and repairing misalignment of binder rings comprising the engagement elements of the device of the instant invention.

Other objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein are set forth, by way of illustration and example, certain embodiments of this invention. The drawings constitute a part of this specification and include exemplary embodiments of the present

invention and illustrate various objects and features thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIGURE 1 is a general view of a ring binder having the device of the instant invention surrounding the second of three rings.

FIGURE 2 is a broken-away view of the third ring of the binder of Figure 1; illustrating a close-up view of the ring binder mechanism known in the prior art.

FIGURES 3A-B Figure 3A is a broken-away view of the second ring of the binder of Figure 1; illustrating a close-up view of the ring surrounded by the device of the instant invention. Figure 3B is a transverse section of the device surrounding the ring shown in Figure 3A illustrating the exterior and interior layers of the device of the instant invention.

FIGURE 4 shows a close-up view of a portion of the device separated to illustrate the pieces which engage to secure the device in place surrounding the binder ring.

FIGURE 5 shows a cross-section of a portion of the piece of the device as shown in Figure 4.

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following list defines terms, phrases and abbreviations used throughout the instant specification. Although the terms, phrases and abbreviations are listed in the singular tense the definitions are intended to encompass all grammatical forms.

As used herein, the term "loose-leaf" refers to sheets of paper or other similar material which are unbound, mobile and contain holes for insertion into ring binders.

As used herein, the term "existing binder ring" refers to an individual ring mechanism present in a ring binder made of metals, plastics or other similar materials; usually a binder has three existing binder rings.

As used herein, the term "substantially covering" refers to an amount of covering of the length of an existing binder ring by the elements of the device of the instant invention sufficient to insure that the papers inserted into the ring can be easily flipped through without snagging or becoming caught on the device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

This invention provides a device for correction and prevention of the most common problem of ring binders, misalignment of the rings with repeated use.

A standard continuous curvature binder ring is the most frequently utilized shape of binder ring and is the shape typically surrounded by the ring binder assembly device of the instant invention. An example of such a binder ring is shown in Figures 1 and 2, labeled as number 1. Figure 1 shows a general view of a ring binder and Figure 2 shows a broken-away view of the portion of Figure 1 labeled by line 2. Figure 2 displays a close-up version of the ring binder mechanism known in the prior art. A binder ring surrounded by the device of the instant invention is labeled number 3 in Figure 1. Figure 3A shows a broken-away view of this portion of Figure 1 labeled by line 3A. Figure 3A displays a close-up view of a binder ring surrounded by the device of the instant invention. The device of the instant invention is composed of at least two elements, labeled numbers 4 and 5 in Figure 3A, each a hollow tube having a shape conforming to the curvature of the binder ring which the device will surround. The at least two elements can be of unitary or segmented construction; for example, elements 4 and 5 represent continuous unitary construction wherein each element substantially covers half of the length of

an existing binder ring and elements 6, 7, 8 and 9 shown in Figure 3A represent segmented construction wherein each element substantially covers about a quarter of the length of an existing binder ring. Thus, as shown in Figure 3A, elements 6 and 7 are engaged to form element 4 and elements 8 and 9 are engaged to form element 5, elements 4 and 5 are then engaged to form the device of the instant invention. The device is often segmented into four elements to facilitate sliding around the existing binder ring during device installation. The device, when completely assembled, should have a diameter of about one to two millimeters greater than the diameter of the existing binder ring for an appropriate fit to insure both proper functioning of the device and substantial covering of the existing binder ring when the ring is in a closed position. This is accomplished by increasing the length of elements 4 and 5 to exceed the length of one half of the existing binder ring in the closed position to insure that elements 4 and 5 are in axial alignment when the device is engaged.

Elements 4 and 5, whether of unitary or segmented construction, are continuous curvature hollow tubes comprising an exterior shell constructed of metal or polymeric material and preferably includes an inner layer of rubber or other elastomeric material. Figure 3B illustrates element 5 of the device cut transversely to show both the exterior polymeric

surface and the elastomeric inner layer, labeled as numbers 10 and 11 respectively in Figure 3B. The section of Figure 3A shown in detail in Figure 3B is labeled with line 3B in Figure 3A. The material of the exterior surface must be durable enough to withstand pressure from the spring loaded mechanism when the mechanism is opening and closing but not too rigid to prevent the device from easily sliding over the existing binder rings. The interior coating is frequently necessary to prevent excessive degrees of movement of the device after installation since excessive movement may impair the function of the device. The fit of the device to the existing binder ring should be sufficiently secure to properly guide each half of the existing binder ring into place in a closed position. The elastomeric material coating the interior of the hollow tubes should also be flexible enough so as not to impede the sliding of the device over the existing binder rings during installation and may further include a thin layer of adhesive for increased adherance to the binder ring. The elastomeric inner layer should be one millimeter or less in width to allow sufficient space for secure enclosure of the existing binder rings.

The engagement of the two opposing elements 4 and 5 gives the device the ability to repair and prevent misalignment of binder rings. One end of element 4 (or element 7 if the device is of segmented construction) is crafted into a funnel shape.

Utilization of the funnel shape enables the device of the invention to guide one half of an existing binder ring to the other half of the ring in axial alignment, thus preventing misalignment and forcing the rings to realign properly should they be out of place. The funnel-shaped end has an increased diameter as compared with the diameter of the straight-edged end, preferably an increase of at least about 4 millimeters. Figure 4 is a close-up view of the opposing ends of elements 4 and 5 in a separated position. Elements 4 and 5 are constructed and arranged for juxtaposed circumferential engagement. Figure 4 shows the funnel-shaped end labeled number 12 and the straight-edged end labeled number 13. Ends 12 and 13 represent male-female mating portions which engage uniformly upon closing of the ring to substantially cover the existing binder ring to prevent and/or repair ring misalignment. Figure 5 shows a cross-section of element 4 labeled number 14. The location of the cut of the cross-section is indicated by line 14A in Figure 4.

The engagement elements that compose the ring binder assembly device of the instant invention can be conveniently packaged as kits. The engagement elements included within the kits can be of unitary construction, segmented construction or a combination of constructions. Additionally, the engagement elements can be sized for binder rings differing in

circumference, for example, but not limited to, binder rings of a half inch, one inch, one and a half inches, two inches, three inches, four inches or five inches. Kits can be packaged including engagement elements of one circumference or of different circumferences.

In this manner, the ring binder assembly device of the instant invention extends the useful "life" of ring binders.

All patents and publications mentioned in this specification are indicative of the levels of those skilled in the art to which the invention pertains. All patents and publications are herein incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each individual publication was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated by reference. It is to be understood that while a certain form of the invention is illustrated, it is not to be limited to the specific form or arrangement herein described and shown. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various changes may be made without departing from the scope of the invention and the invention is not to be considered limited to what is shown and described in the specification. One skilled in the art will readily appreciate that the present invention is well adapted to carry out the objectives and obtain the ends and advantages mentioned, as well as those inherent therein. Changes therein and other uses will occur to those skilled in the art which are

encompassed within the spirit of the invention and are defined by the scope of the appended claims. Although the invention has been described in connection with specific preferred embodiments, it should be understood that the invention as claimed should not be unduly limited to such specific embodiments. Indeed, various modifications of the described modes for carrying out the invention which are obvious to those skilled in the art are intended to be within the scope of the following claims.